

ENGLISHMAN'S HAMLET PLEASES BROADWAY.

By Franklin Fyles.

New York, March 11. FORBES ROBERTSON'S Hamlet has come into Broadway and been received cordially. Our talk about him reaches up to enthusiastic admiration and does not fall below serious respect. Lucid, modern, sensitive, intellectual, illuminative, distinctive—these are adjectives which the more critical among us use. But the first audience here did not have to make up its mind independently about the quality of the performance, or to wait for the next day's newspapers before settling down on an opinion, for London had appraised the value of the performance seven years before and that was sufficient authority for the guidance of a New York fashionable assemblage. The advertisements declare it the best since Booth, and I think that is so, excepting Irving. For a descriptive purpose and not to say aught against our latest Hamlet, it may be noted that Robertson's is almost everything that Robertson's is not—particularly that it is robust, emotional, picturesque and melodramatic, while the Englishman's is delicate, thoughtful, unobtrusive and above all untheatrical. Jennie Eustace gives evidence of the contrasting noisiness of Southern and the quietude of Robertson. Miss Eustace's Queen Gertrude is the best portrayal in each production aside from Hamlet. When she was with Sothern she raised and forced her voice to a key with his in the chamber scene, which he played tumultuously, and now with Robertson, although she moderates her vocal power considerably, she is still too loud for harmony.

The English Hamlet has an American Ophelia in the comely person of Gertrude Elliott-Robertson, sister of Maxine Elliott-Goodwin. She acquires herself tolerably, as any actress of fair ability always does in that role, but with far less distinction than she has gained in London since she went there with the Goodwins as the southerly "The Cowboy and the Lady." From that employment she passed up to the Annie Russell heroines in "A Royal Family" and "Mico and Men." It was in the comedy last named that she became a stage associate of Forbes Robertson, as he was the ethnologist who, in that piece, fell in love with the founding girl whom he scientifically developed into a lady, but relinquished to a younger and sexier suitor. In private life, however, he wooed, won and wedded her. Now, Robertson and Mrs. Pat Campbell had been copied closely in dramatic art and of the plays in which they had acted together was "The Sacrament of Judas," the short tragedy which Kyrie Bellew and James O'Neill are using in this country and which Mrs. Campbell owned. Robertson's marriage with Miss Elliott personally operated as a divorce between him and Mrs. Campbell professionally; yet in a mood that seemed amiable she sent the play to him as a wedding gift. However, if her purpose had been vengeful she couldn't have accomplished it more effectually, for he had the piece written out to a full evening's length and not only lost much money in that version, but brought abuse upon his bride for presuming to take the place of the pet Mrs. Pat as the heroine.

New material was interspersed with selections from current shows in the matinee entertainment for the Actors' Home. Clay M. Greene contributed "For Sweet Love's Sake," the slung-around of which lay in the fact that the inter-sex emotion indicated by the title didn't introduce the girl in the case, while the affection shown in the action was between a companionable father and son. Grace Livingston Furness' "A Dakota Widow" had for visible characters a divorced couple and their household, and the oddity was the use of a telephone to communicate with several other persons invisible yet intimately connected with the separation and reunion of the husband and wife. Cosmo Gordon Lennox, husband of Marie Tempest, provided "The March of

Time" from a French comedy located newly in England. Its characters were a gay actress who had many admirers to make rich gifts, a poor fellow who could offer nothing but honest love, and a player of the time and type of Cleopatra, who, being reincarnated in an experiment in spiritualism, told about her experience with a lot of affluent Egyptian sensualists, and the tragic fate of a chap who wooed with a full heart and an empty purse. This was a deft though fanciful composition, with a jolly ballad for the English actress, a dramatic recitation for the Egyptian and a good lesson, which was to keep away from sirens of the stage.

You will believe that such entertainments as are given annually for the Actors' Home by volunteers couldn't be made by any expenditure of money, when I tell you that in the short casts of these three brief plays were William H. Thompson, Hattie Williams, Dorothy Dorr, Elsie De Wolfe and Robert Edeson, who are, or have been, "stars," besides Joseph Wheelock, Marie Doro, Richard Bennett and May Robson, all of whom had studied and rehearsed laboriously for the single occasion. There was also a burlesque called "Shylock Before the Court of Appeals," which was flatly stupid, though another set of "stars" in it were Lawrence D'Orsay, Alice Fischer, Eugene O'Rourke and Edwin Arden, and "The Holidays," a hardly more amusing sketch, by seven members of the Twelfth Night club. But the bill included also monologues by five heads of companies now in town, Kyrie Bellew, Richard Carl, Sam Bernard, Raymond Hitchcock and William North, and show girl scenes of song and movement from five extraneous vagabonds. How is that for an occasional afternoon? And is it any wonder that a big theatre was crowded at prices which yielded \$8,000?

The most memorable American performance of "Hamlet" was given to save Lester Wallack from poverty. It earned every dollar of the twenty thousand that, through donations and an auction sale, were put into the genial old spendthrift's pockets. His vogue was gone and he had saved no money from it. Albert M. Palmer and Augustin Daly had been his rivals for a decade and neither had yet arrived at the end of his own prosperity. Daly had ever declined to affiliate in anything whatever with Palmer or any other manager. His charities, like all his other concerns, had been absolutely isolated. But he accepted Palmer's invitation to join in an endeavor to save the brief remnant of Wallack's life from poverty. So a remarkable presentation of "Hamlet" was brought about. I saw it and my recollection is vivid. Ed in Booth, who usually played as though he were working, calmly and coolly roused himself to an exceptional effort. His art this time glowed warmly, instead of shining coldly, in its brilliance. But it was Helena Modjeska who both surprised and delighted us, because none of us had ever seen Ophelia embodied by an actress of her grade. We had been accustomed, as you have, to pretty, plaintive, appealing Ophelias, and so an achievement of genius in the character was a revelation. Here was a woman who, though two or three times too old, and with a speech marred by a Polish accent, applied great gifts and accomplishments to a portrayal of the pitifully loving and dying maid of Elsinore.

But there was a disappointment quite as positive in John Gilbert's Polonius. This mainstay of the Wallack company, with his Sir Peter Teazle and his Sir Anthony Absolute, had long been the standard of best quality in stage old men, and by that we gauged our expectation of what his Polonius would be. It was an amazing display of bad elocution, of lacking humor and even of intelligence. There were such full compensations as the Gravediggers by Joseph Jefferson and William J. Florence, a king and a queen by Frank Mayo and Madame Fonié, a ghost by Lawrence Barrett and a cast which did not contain a name not well known. Ah,

but Shakespeare would have liked to be in the Metropolitan opera house that night. I wonder if he was.

The sum of money obtained for Wallack might have been multiplied, no doubt, by selling admissions to the rehearsals. Outsiders were excluded very carefully from these preparatory gatherings of famous artists. Ben Teal was the stage manager. He customarily uses strong language in the course of his duties, and sometimes it is profane. His instructions to minor performers are tersely explicit. But I have been told that, while of course he didn't give, in even a mild whisper, any suggestions to the more eminent members of this volunteer company, he was most polite in saying as much as boo to Roseneranz and Guhlster, the player king and queen, as they were acted by favorite leaders of stock organizations.

The arrangement of the tragedy which had been made for Edwin Booth by William Winter was used, and Booth was asked by Modjeska to control the scenes in which they were together. He did it with so much deference that she begged him to assert himself. But in the passages of Ophelia's madness she carried out her own ideas like a boss of the situation. Jefferson and Florence laughed and joked in the little rehearsal that they were seen to do as the gravediggers, but they were thought to have settled all the points elsewhere socially by themselves. Barrett was the deciding voice in most of the questions that had to be settled by some one. He was great.

Beatrice Harriden wrote, as you know, a novel entitled "Ships That Pass in the Night." It was all tears and no smiles. Therefore I was surprised when I went to see Justin Huntley McCarthy's play bearing the same name and found that it was not a dramatization of the book, but a London version of a Paris farce. Its theme is the everlasting tug of a faithless husband fooling a fondly jealous wife. But it is a hypnotic variant. Whenever Mr. Little wickedly wishes to get away from his own wife and visit Mr. Pottis, he holds her hands, looks straight into her eyes, turns on his mesmeric power and she goes to sleep, to stay so until he comes back and awakens her. While she is thus snoring, however, the kisses of a former suitor arouse her and she is kept wide awake by the arrival of Mr. Yoistoi, who is maddened by the infidelity of his wife. There you have the situation, and it isn't worth while to describe the confusion of difficulties that beset the hypnotist ere he is cured of his scientific fad and his marital folly by his wife's false pretense that, while she has been asleep, another man has made her believe he was her husband.

She usually mentions her supposed visitor as a "ship that has passed in the night." That is the excuse for changing the title from the original French for "His Little Dodge."

That farce is performed by one of our seven resident dramatic companies. As there are only a half dozen characters, the acting is much better than usual with these hurried and skurried stock organizations. They are, mostly composed, here as elsewhere, of two distinct kinds of members—veterans who have got along as far in their profession as they expect to, and aspirants who are impelled by their ambition to make earnest efforts, which are uncertain in results, according as they are wise or foolish. Let me illustrate. In one week I went to see a familiar drama at two of these cut-rate houses in further ends of the town. In one case the heroine was played with perfunctory stress, but without subtlety or feeling, by an actress whose name was known throughout the country. She felt no other incentive than her salary. In the other case the actress was a

girl lately graduated from a dramatic school. She had more than memorized the words. She had studied them, intelligently and she expressed their utmost meanings with all the facility at her command. The outcome was a better rendering of the part than had been given in the original Broadway production of the play.

These stock companies in New York contain many members who have joined as a means of placing themselves in easier and more outlooking places. Eight leading actors and six low comedians have gone from them within four years to be "starred" or "featured" in new plays, and maybe as many actresses have progressed similarly over the hard, rough stepping stones. By chance I learned of a doorkeeper sending word to a young woman on the stage that the secretary of an important producing manager had just entered the theatre. She had written to ask for a consideration of what she was doing that week and how. So she was warned to do her very best that afternoon. Since then I have ascertained that all the men who bring out new pieces are in daily receipt of such requests, and that it is not unusual to comply with them.

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